



(Copyright, 1895)
CHAPTER I.

It would be easy to walk many a time through "Fife and a' the lands about it" and never once find the little fishing hamlet of Pittencreigie. Indeed it would be a singular thing if it was found, unless some special business and direction led to it. For clearly it was never intended that human beings should build homes where these cottages cling together, between sea and sky; a few here and a few there, hidden away in every band of the rock, where a little ground could be levelled, until the tides, in stormy weather, break with threat and fury on the very door-steps of the lowest cottages.

Yet as the lofty semicircle of hills bends inward, the sea follows, and there is a fair harbor, where the fishing boats ride together, while their sails dry in the afternoon sun. Then the hamlet is still, for the men are sleeping off the weariness of their night work, while the children play quietly among the tangle and the women mend nets or bait the lines for the next fishing. A lonely little spot, shut in by sea and land, and yet life is there in all its passionate variety—love and hate, jealousy and aversion, youth, with its ideal sorrows and infinite expectations; age, with its memories and regrets, and "sure and certain hope."

The cottages also have their individualities. Although they are much of the same size and pattern, an observing eye would have picked out the Binnie cottage as distinctive and prepossessing. Its outside walls were as white as lime could make them, its small windows brightened with geraniums, and a muslin curtain, and the litter of ropes and nets and drying fish which encumbered the majority of thatches was pleasantly absent. Standing on a little level, thirty feet above the shingle, it faced the open sea, and was constantly filled with the confused tones of its sighing surges, and penetrated by its pulsating, tremendous vitality. It had been the home of many generations of Binnies, and the very old and the very young had usually shared its comforts together, but at the time of my story there remained of the family only the widow of the last proprietor, her son Andrew and her daughter Christina.

Christina was twenty years old and still unmarried—a strange thing in Pittencreigie, where early marriage is the rule. Some said she was vain and set up with her beauty, and could find no lad good enough; others thought she was a selfish, cold-blooded lassie, feared for the care and labors of a fisher's wife. On this July afternoon the girl had been some hours stretching and mending the pile of nets at her feet, but at length they were in perfect order, and she threw her arms upward and outward to relieve their weariness, and then went to the open door. The tide was coming in, but the children were still paddling in the pools, and on the cold bladder-wreck, and she stepped forward to the edge of the cliff and threw them some wild geranium and ragwort. Then she stood motionless in the bright sunlight, looking down the shingle towards the pier and the little tavern, from which came in drowsy tones the rough monotonous songs which sea men sing.

Standing thus in the clear strong light, her great beauty was not to be denied. She was tall and not too slender, and at this moment the set of her head was like that of a thoroughbred horse, when it pricks its ears to listen. She had full soft brown eyes, with long lashes and heavy eyebrows; an open complexion, dazzling even teeth, an abundance of dark rippling hair, and a flush of ardent life, opening her wide nostrils and stirring gently the exquisite mounds of her throat and bust. The moral impression she gave was that of a pure, strong, compassionate woman; cool-headed, but not cold; capable of vigorous joys and griefs. After a few minutes' investigation she went back to the cottage and stood in the open doorway with her head leaning against the lintel. Her mother had begun to prepare the evening meal; fresh fish was frying over the fire, and the out-



STANDING THUS IN THE CLEAR STRONG LIGHT.

cakes toasting before it; yet as she moved rapidly about she was watching her daughter and very soon she gave words to her thoughts.

"Christina, you'll no require to be looking after Andrew. The lad has been asleep ever since he ate his dinner."

"I know that mother."

"And if it's Jamie Lauder you're thinking o', let me tell you it's a poor thinking. I have a fear and an inward down-sinking about that young man."

"Perfect nonsense, mother! There's nothing to fear you about Jamie."

"What good ever came through folk saved from the sea? They bring sorrow back wi' them, and that's a fact well known."

"What could Andrew do but save the lad?"

"Why was the lad running before such a sea? He should have got into harbor; there was time enough. And if it was Andrew's duty to save him, it is no your duty to be loving him; you may tak' that much sense from me."

"What, mother! He hasna said a word o' love to me."

"He perfectly changes colors the moment he sees you, and you are just making yourself a speculation to the whole village, Christina. I'm no liking the look o' the thing, and Andrew's no liking it, and if you dinna tak' care o' yourself, you'll be in a burning fever o'—"

first love and beyond all reasoning with."

The girl flushed hotly, came into the house and began to reset the tea tray, for she heard Jamie's steps upon the rocky road, and his voice, clear as a blackbird's, was whistling "In the Day of Biscay, O."

"The tea cups are a' right, Christina. I'm talking ament Jamie Lauder. The lad is just a temptation to you, and you'll need to ask for strength to be kept from temptation, for the best o' us dinna expect strength to resist it."

Christina turned her face to her mother and then left her answer to Jamie Lauder. He came in at the moment with a little tartan shawl in his hand, which he gallantly threw across the shoulders of Mistress Binnie. "I had just bought it from a peddler loon," he said. "It's bonnie and soft, and it sets you weel, and I hope you'll please me by wearing it."

His face was so bright, his manner so charming, that it was impossible for Janet Binnie to resist him. "You're a dooching, flattering laddie," she answered, but she stroked and fingered the gay kerchief, while Christina made her observe how bright were the colors of it, and how neatly and soft folds fell around her. Then the door of the inner room opened, and Andrew came sleepily out.

"The fish is burning, and the cat cakes, too, for I'm smelling them both the house," he said, and Janet ran to the fireside and hastily turned her her- ring and cakes.

"I'm feared you'll no think much o' your meat to-night," she said, regretfully, "the tea is fairly ruined."

"Never mind the meat, mother," said Andrew; "we dinna live to eat."

"Never mind the meat! What perfect nonsense! There's something wrong wi' folks that dinna mind their meat."

"Weel, then, you shouldna be so vain o' yourself, mother. You were preening like a young lassie when I got sight o' you—and the meat taking care o' it—"

"Me vain! Na, na! Naobody that kens Janet Binnie can say she's vain. I wot weel, that I am a frail, miserable creature, wi' little need o' being vain, either o' myself or my bairns. But draw to the table and eat; I'll warrant the fish will prove better than it's bonnie."

They sat down with a pleasant content that soon broadened into mirth and laughter, as Jamie Lauder began to tell and to show how the peddler lad fleeced and dethorred the fisher wives out of their bawbees, adding at the last that he "couldna come within sight o' their fine words, they were that civil to him."

"Ou, ay, senselessly civil, nae doubt o' it," said Janet. "A peddler aye gives the whole village a fit of the liberalities. The like o' Jean Robertson spending a crown on him. The words are no to seek, that she'll get from me in the morning."

Then Jamie took a letter from his pocket and showed it to Andrew. "Robert Toddy brought it this afternoon," he said, "and as you may see, it is from the Hendersons o' Glasgow, and they say there will be a berth soon for two in one o' their ships. A fine sailor on that line. I may be a captain myself one o' these days!"

And he looked so bravely into the face of such a bold idea that he persuaded everyone else to expect it for him. Janet pulled her new shawl a little closer and smiled; her thought was—"After all Christina may wait longer and fare worse, for she's turned twenty!"

"Are you then Glasgow born, Jamie Lauder?"

"No Glasgow born! What are you thinking o'? I'm from the auld East Nook, and I'm proud o' being a Fife. A' my common sense comes from Fife. There's nae love the 'Kingdom' mair than Jamie Lauder. We're a' Fife gither. I thought you knew it."

At these words there was a momentary shadow across the door, and a little lassie slipped in, and when she did so every one put down their cup to welcome her. Andrew reddened to the roots of his hair; his eyes filled with light, a tender smile softened his firm mouth, and he put out his hand and drew the girl to the chair which Christina had pushed close to his own.

"You're a sight for sair e'en, Sophy Traill," said Mistress Binnie; but for all that she gave Sophy a glance, in which there was much speculation, not unmixed with fear and disapproval, for it was easy to see that Andrew Binnie loved her, and that she was not at all like him, nor yet like the fisher girls at Pittencreigie. Sophy, however, was not responsible for this difference, for early orphanage had placed her in the care of an aunt, who carried on a dress and bonnet-making business in Largo; and she had turned the little fisher maid into a girl after her own heart and wishes.

She came frequently, indeed, to visit her own people in Pittencreigie, but she had gradually grown less and less like them, and there was no wonder that Mistress Binnie asked herself fearfully, "What kind of a wife at all she would make for a Fife fisherman?" She was so small and gentle, she had such a lovely face, such fair rippling hair, and her gown was of blue muslin, made in the fashion of the day, and finished with a lace collar round her throat and a ribbon belt round her slender waist. "A bonnie lass for a carriage and pair," thought Janet Binnie, "but whatever will she do wi' the cool and the nets, no to speak o' the bairns and the housework?"

Andrew was too much in love to consider these questions. When he was six years old he had carried Sophy in his arms all day long; when he was twelve they had paddled on the sands and fished, and played, and learned their lessons together. She had promised then to be his wife, as soon as he was a man and had a house and boat of his own; and never for one moment since had Andrew doubted the validity and certainty of this promise. To Andrew, and to Andrew's family, and to the whole village of Pittencreigie, the marriage of Andrew Binnie and Sophy Traill was a fact beyond disputing. Some said "it was the right thing," and mair said it was the "foolish thing," and among the latter was Andrew's mother, though as yet she had said it very cautiously to Andrew, whom she regarded as "clean daft and senseless" to be so sure of the lassie.

But she sent the young people out of the house while she redid the disorder made by the evening meal, though

as she wiped her tea cups she went frequently to the little window and looked at the four young things sitting together on the bit of turf which carpeted the top of the cliff before the cottage. Andrew, as a privileged lover, held Sophy's hand; Christina sat next to her brother and facing Jamie Lauder, so it was easy to see how her face kindled and her manner softened to the charm of his merry conversation, his snatches of breezy song, and his sly bits of mimicry. And as Janet walked to and fro, setting her cups and plates in the rack and putting in place the table and chairs, she did what we might all do more frequently and be the wiser for it—she talked to herself, to the real woman within her, and thus got to the bottom of things.

In less than an hour there began to be a movement about the pier, and then Andrew and Jamie went away to their night's work; and the girls sat still and watched the men across the level sands, and the boats hurrying out to the fishing grounds. Then they went back to



"WE'RE OUR LANE, SOPHY," SAID CHRISTINA.

the cottage, and found that Mistress Binnie had taken her knitting and gone to chat with a crony who lived higher up the cliff.

"We're our lane, Sophy," said Christina, "but women folk are often that." She spoke a little sadly, the sweet melancholy of conscious but unacknowledged love being heavy in her heart; and she would not have been sorry, had she been quite alone with her vaguely happy dreams. Neither of the girls was inclined to talk, but Christina wondered at Sophy's silence, for she had been unusually merry while the young men were present.

Now she sat quiet on the doorstep, clasping her left knee with hands that had no sign of labor on them but the mark of the needle on the left forefinger. At her side Christina stood, her tall, straight figure seeming nobly clad in a striped blue and white linen petticoat, and a little posy of lilac print, cut low enough to show the white, firm throat above it. Her fine face radiated thought and feeling; she was on the verge of that experience which glorifies the simplest life. The exquisite gloaming, the tender sky, the full heaving sea were in sweetest sympathy; they were sufficient, and Sophy's thin, fretful voice broke the chime and almost offended her.

"It is a weary life, Christina! How do you thole it?"

"You're just talking. You were happy enough half an hour syne."

"I wasn't happy at all."

"You let on like you were. I should think you would be as feared to act a lie as to tell one."

"I'll be away from Pittencreigie to-morrow morn."

"Whatna for?"

"I have my reasons."

"No doubt you have a 'because' o' your own, but what will Andrew say? He's no expecting it."

"I dinna care what he says."

"Sophy Traill!"

"I dinna; Andrew Binnie is na the whole o' life to me."

"Whatever is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

Then there was a pause, and Christina's thoughts flew seaward. In a few minutes, however, Sophy began talking again. "Do you come often as far as Largo, Christina?" she asked.

"While I take myself that far. You may count me up for the last year; I sought you every time."

"Ay, do you mind on the Law road a bonnie house, fine and old, with a braw garden, and peacocks in it, trailing their long feathers o'er the grass gravel?"

"You'll be meaning Braelands? Folks canna miss the house, if they tried to."

"I was wondering if you ever noticed a young man about the place. He is aye dressed for the saddle, or else he is in the saddle, and so, maist sure to have a whip in his hand."

"What are you talking for?"

"He is brawly handsome. They call him Archie Braelands."

"I have heard tell o' him, and by what is said I shouldn't think he was an improving friend for any young girl to have."

"This or that, he likes me. He likes me beyond everything."

"Do you know what you are saying, Sophy?"

"I do, fine."

"Are you liking him?"

"It wouldn't be hard to do."

"Has he ever spoke to you?"

"Weel, he has spoke to me as a fisher lad. I find him in my way when I'm no thinking; and see here, Christina! I got a letter from him this afternoon. A real love letter. Such bonnie words! They are like poetry. They are bonnie as singing."

"Did you tell Andrew this?"

"Why would I do that?"

"You are a false, little cutty, Sophy Traill. I would tell Andrew myself, but I'm loth to hurt his true heart. Now, you be to leave Archie Braelands alone, or I'll ken the reason why."

"Gude preserve us! What a blazing passion for nothing! Can't a lassie gie a bit o' lassie's chat without

calling a court o' sessions anent it?" And she rose and shook her skirt and said with an air of offense: "You may tell Andrew if you like to. It would be a poor thing if a girl is to be misalled every time a man told her she was bonnie."

"I'm no saying you can help men making fools o' themselves, but you should have told Braelands you were a promised wife."

"Everybody can't live in Pittencreigie, Christina, and if you live with a town full, you canna go up and down saying to every man-body, 'Please, sir, I have a lad o' my ain, and you're no to look at me.' But gude night, Christina; you and me are auld friends, and it will be mair than a lad that parts us."

"But you'll nae treat Andrew ill. I couldna love you, Sophy, if you did the like o' that."

"Gie him a kiss for me, and you may say I would hae told him I was going back to Largo the morn, but I canna bear to see him unhappy. That's a word that will set him on the mast head o' pride and pleasure."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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"In July, 1863, while my company was on the march through to Austin, Texas, I was attacked with rheumatism of the worst kind in one leg at Alexander, La. Being weak I was unstruck, and remained unconscious for several hours. Every summer since I have been unable to stand the heat of the sun, and have been compelled to give up my work. There was in my head a bearing down feeling, which increased until it seemed my head would burst, and it caused a ringing in my ears, and palpitation of the heart set in, so that the slightest noise would set my heart thumping. Several times it has rendered me unconscious for from seven to ten hours at a time. In addition to this the rheumatism extended up my entire side until it drew my head down on my shoulder. I lost my strength and flesh, and was totally unfit for work."

"For twenty-eight years, I have consulted physicians and taken their prescriptions without deriving any material benefit. My ailments increased in intensity until I was assured that there was no hope for me. During last year I went into the butcher business, but the dampness from the ice used increased my rheumatic pains to such an extent that I was not only compelled to quit the business, but was confined to my house and bed for nearly six months."

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